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THE LAST SHIP

12 March-7 April 2018

Music and lyrics

STING

Directed by

LORNE CAMPBELL

Designed by

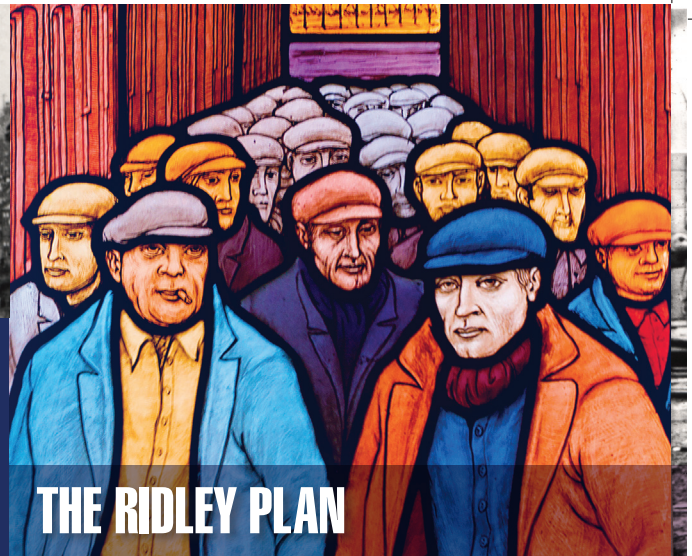
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THE HISTORY OF SHIPBUILDING AND PROTEST



A detailed plan for how to fight, and defeat, a major strike in a nationalised industry was part of the Conservatives' preparation for power, and helped win the defining conflict of the Thatcher years, writes Dr Martin Farr.

One of the reasons the Conservative Government elected in 1979 under Margaret Thatcher was so significant was that it was, as much if not more than the Labour Government elected in 1945 under Clement Attlee, the twentieth century British government which had the clearest sense of what it wanted to do. Which was, in essence, to fragment the legacy of the 1945 government. The Conservative Government elected in 1970 under Edward Heath also had a clear sense of what it wanted to achieve, which was similar, but it baulked at the opposition it provoked. The Heath government's change of heart became known as the 'U-turn', and the memory of that betrayal became as intense for some conservatives as that of Ramsay MacDonald in 1931 was for many socialists. The humiliation of the Heath government was one of the animating forces behind the determination of the Thatcher government not to repeat it once in office.

The Ridley Plan was a part of the Conservatives' preparation for power. Its author, Nicholas Ridley (second son of the 3rd Viscount Ridley, who helped establish the University of Newcastle in 1963), was perhaps the most Thatcherite of all of Thatcher's ministers. He resigned from the Heath government in 1972 over what he saw as its betrayal, and formed the Selsdon Group the following year 'to influence the Conservative Party, so that it embraces economic and social policies which extend the boundaries of personal choice'. It espoused free-market policies, privatisation of nationalised industries, and cuts in taxation and

'we must take every precaution possible to strengthen our defences against all-out attack'

government spending. Only in private provision of health care, and education vouchers, did it want to go further than Thatcher was to deem practicable. Nevertheless, Thatcher's was, as Ridley entitled his memoirs, 'My Style of Government'.

In 1977, with a minority Labour Government in office, a general election could take place at any time. A manifesto needed to be prepared, and as part of that





process Keith Joseph, commonly regarded as the principal architect of Thatcherism, commissioned the Nationalised Industries Policy Group Report. In 28 clearly-written pages, it diagnosed the essential problem of nationalised industries, and indeed the state-supported public sector: 'immunity from bankruptcy'. It was the threat of failure which incentivised the private sector; it followed that publicly-run services were incapable of efficiency. There were five stages to what became known as the Ridley Plan. The first was to allow for government paying a higher wage rise to public sector workers than the going rate: 'if the policy can survive intact by paying higher than average wage claim it would be a victory'. The second was that 'a victory on ground of our choosing would discourage an attack on more vulnerable ground' (suggested 'non-vulnerable' industries to be targeted included British Rail, British Leyland, or British Steel). Denationalisation of such industries, or, as the report put it, their 'return to the private sector', was the strategy; on page 24, in a 'CONFIDENTIAL ANNEX', were the tactics: 'COUNTERING THE POLITICAL THREAT'. 'We must be prepared for these stratagems to fail', Ridley concluded, 'and we must take every precaution possible to strengthen our defences against all-out attack in a highly vulnerable industry ... the most likely area is coal'.

'the problem of violent picketing required a large, mobile squad of police who are prepared and equipped to uphold the law.'

The report predicted that the trigger would be 'redundancies or closures'. The experience of the miners' strike of 1972, and in particular the 'Battle of Saltley Gate' coke works ('the miners' Agincourt') was instructive: the next battle should only commence with the maximum quantity of coal stockpiled, with plans in place for coal imports and the employment of non-unionised haulage drivers. The cutting off of state funds for strikers 'is clearly vital', and 'the problem of violent picketing' required 'a large, mobile squad of police who are prepared and equipped to uphold the law'. The report was leaked, a row ensued, the report disavowed; but the intent was known. The Ridley Plan became demonised on the left, as an order of battle for war against the forces of labour. Indeed, the plan could not have been more prescient. Ridley had predicted 'there is no doubt that at some time the enemies of the next Tory Government will try to destroy this policy'. He expected the challenge to come between six and ten months after the election. As with much else in the plan, that also proved to be correct, except that the election the challenge followed was not that of 1979, but of 1983, when the government was re-elected with a parliamentary majority not seen since 1945. As it concluded, eight years earlier, implementation of the Ridley Plan 'should enable us to hold the fort until the long term strategy of fragmentation can begin to work'. Next on the list of industries where 'the scope for fragmentation ... is greatest', after coal, was one central to the region from which the Riddleys came: 'shipbuilding'.

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CREATIVES

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LORNE CAMPBELL

Director and Book
Writer

ROB MATHES

Orchestrator

RICHARD JOHN

Musical Director

59 PRODUCTIONS

Designer

MOLLY EINHCOMB

Costume Designer

LUCY HIND

Movement Director

MATT DAW

Lighting Designer

SEBASTIAN FROST

Sound Designer

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Producer

NORTHERN STAGE

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STAGE

A Northern Stage Production
In association with
KARL SYDOW
& KATHRYN SCHENKER

New Book by
Lorne Campbell

Original Book by
John Logan and Brian Yorkey

